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ABSTRACT

The use of peer evaluation in assessing teaching effectiveness is discussed and two techniques that utilize peer evaluation are explained in this paper. Peer evaluation is viewed as a comprehensive measure of teaching effectiveness and a necessary supplement to student evaluation of teacher performance. It is suggested that this method be carried out either indirectly by requiring each faculty member to present a seminar report to his/her peers or by evaluating faculty performance through the use of video tape. Advantages and disadvantages of both methods are examined. It is suggested that the seminar and video taping technique need further exploration to realize their full potential as evaluation methods. The importance of peer evaluation as an element for improving instructional technique is emphasized. (SF)

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PEER EVALUATIONS - A NECESSARY PART OF EVALUATING TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS

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There are many methods available for measuring effectiveness in teaching. These measurements are seen to be an increasingly important responsibility of academic units in this era of university and collegiate accountability. The most common method currently being used is that of the student evaluation which seems to be especially useful from the standpoint of evaluating textual or audio visual materials from the learner's perspective.

Unfortunately, student evaluations seem to be less effective measures of the instructor's knowledge of his or her subject matter and of the instructor's completeness in presenting course material. If a comprehensive measure of teaching effectiveness is to develop, student evaluations must be supplemented with other measuring methods designed to highlight the instructor's knowledge and the completeness of his presentation.

Peer evaluation is seen as one strong alternative in this regard. The objective of peer evaluation is to allow competent authorities in the discipline to observe the instructional techniques of the teacher being evaluated. If peer evaluation is to be constructive, the peer group should identify the instructor's strengths in teaching style for dissemination and possible use throughout the department. In addition the instructor's weak points should be isolated with their correction as the ultimate goal.

There are several technical problems that are associated with attempts at peer evaluation that must be dealt with before this approach can be put into widespread use by collegiate units. First, departments with even a moderately sized faculty have found direct classroom visitation by peers disruptive and threatening. Second, if faculty members visited the class individually, they were often comparing completely different teaching events since teachers could

easily have either extraordinarily good or bad days. Third, once the visitation was over, the peer group had to rely on memory and notes to evaluate the performance. Over time, the recollection of the true performance could change substantially, thereby reducing the impact of such an evaluation.

Many of these technical problems result from the widespread belief that peer evaluation is synonomous with direct peer classroom visitations. However, peer evaluation may be conducted in at least two other distinct ways. First, a faculty member's classroom technique may be evaluated through the medium of faculty seminars. Second, a faculty member's classroom performance may be evaluated through the medium of a video tape.

Option 1: Peer evaluation may be accomplished indirectly by requiring each faculty member to present a seminar report to this department's peers. A seminar has the advantage of providing the peer group with a controlled atmosphere where the evaluated faculty member can use his or her best verbal and nonverbal techniques to present complex ideas. The seminar would indicate the faculty member's ability to prepare for such a presentation and the delivery would provide an indication of the member's ability to explain the material and to field questions related to this material.

The strength of a controlled atmosphere is also the weakness of the seminar approach. Since the paper is prepared especially for the benefit of the peers, the seminar may lack some of the essential qualities necessary for an effective classroom presentation. Furthermore, the faculty member's fielding of questions from peers and relating to this group would probably have some essential differences from similar interaction with students, particularly at the undergraduate level. Nevertheless, the seminar approach is a viable alternative to direct classroom visitation and should be considered by any department contemplating peer evaluation.

Option 2: Peer evaluations may also be accomplished by evaluating a faculty member's performance in the classroom through video tape. Under this instant replay scheme, each faculty member of a department would have at least one of his or her lectures video taped for later viewing by other department members. The video taping procedure has the advantage of providing a flexible schedule for review by the faculty member's peers and of removing the disruptive element of several faculty members entering a class while in session.

In order to help the faculty and students to understand the implications of using a video tape, an initial taping session should be scheduled for use by the faculty member and apart from the evaluating process. This taping session will permit each faculty member to get acquainted with the video tape equipment in the classroom and to see the potential strengths and weaknesses of the medium in terms of picking up the essential qualities of his or her classroom presentation. In addition, the peer group should be provided with standardized evaluation forms that will be used in conjunction with the tapes. These standardized forms will be similar to student evaluation forms but will stress the faculty member's capability of conveying the essential course ideas to his students.

Since the video tapes are a permanent record of the faculty member's teaching performance, this technique of peer evaluation provides several added dimensions to the measuring of teaching effectiveness. First, the strong points of each teacher's technique can be visualized and disseminated both to the department and interested outside observers. No longer will good teaching techniques die after delivery. Second, the weak points of each teacher's techniques may be systematically reviewed and studied for future correction. Third, a teacher may compare past video tapes for signs of improvement or decay in his or her classroom manner. Finally, these video tapes may be used as evidence of effective teaching techniques for promotion, tenure and salary consideration.

The most obvious disadvantage of this method is that a video tape may distort, somehow, the true qualities of a given lecture by not picking up all of the character of the student-teacher interaction or by failing to effectively demonstrate the use of common audio-visual aids designed for the classroom rather than for television use. Even considering these disadvantages, the video tape technique still provides a peer evaluation possibility worthy of consideration.

Conclusion: Teaching evaluation can no longer be avoided at the collegiate level of our education system. The public demand for educational accountability requires that colleges and universities evaluate the effectiveness of classroom experiences. Peer evaluation of faculty members is a necessary part of this evaluation procedure. While educators, particularly at the collegiate level, have resisted peer evaluation because of technical problems of classroom visitation, peer evaluation can be accomplished either indirectly through seminars or directly by video tape. Of these two, video taping seems to provide an excellent medium for conducting peer evaluation which avoids the problems of direct visitation while retaining the classroom atmosphere. Finally, effective peer evaluation can become a reality only after the techniques of seminar and video taping have been more fully explored. Peer evaluation should become an important element in measuring a teacher's effectiveness and improving instructional techniques.

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